



State Representative Steve Conway

29th District

2010 Session Report

Dear Neighbors,

The 2009-2010 legislative session was one of the most challenging in Washington State's history. In February 2008, Washington State experienced the *highest* employment levels in our history at almost 3 million jobs. But by that September, the financial mess on Wall Street quickly altered this picture. By the end of December 2009, unemployment reached 9.6 percent. In Tacoma, it reached 10 percent.

For five decades, Washington state revenue has always increased, due directly to the growth in our economy and population. But for the first time, revenue actually fell in 2009 by 1.8 billion from March 2009 to March 2010. The recession's impact on the 120,000 residents of the 29th district was more direct: 6600 of our neighbors receiving unemployment benefits; 13,000 of our neighbors on food assistance; 18,000 receiving some form of state medical help, and many struggling with a fall in home values. In many ways, our district became 'ground zero' of the recession.

Keep in mind, this was not of our making, but created by the greed of Wall Street. Our challenge in Olympia was to adjust our budget accordingly, while at the same time, helping our citizens survive this economic crisis. This was the balancing act of our session. Our second need was to help restore employment for our citizens. This legislative report is designed to share our legislature's response to this challenge.

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At the same time as the Great Recession, the 29th Legislative District was home to the worst attack upon police officers in our state's history, the Lakewood police shootings last November. We all shared in the grief of our uniformed police and fire fighters in this loss of life through prayer vigils and memorials.

We resolved to both help the families of our fallen officers as well as prevent further events of this nature from occurring.

As always, I appreciate your response to this newsletter. We are living in most difficult times. We must recognize our need to work together to solve these challenges and restore opportunity for all the residents of the 29th District.

Steve Conway



Thousands rallied at the Capitol this session to save education, health care, and social service funding from budget cuts.

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Commitee Assignments:

- Commerce and Labor - *Chair*
- Ways and Means
- Finance
- Select Committee on Pension Policy
- Labor and Workforce Development Committee, NCSL
(*National Conference of State Legislatures*)



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Solving the Budget Crisis

We solved this year's budget crisis by cutting state spending, using federal assistance, using money from our rainy day fund, and finally raising nearly \$800 million in new revenue.

In the 2009 session, we filled the budget deficit with a drastic all-cuts budget, plus some federal assistance. Overall, we spent \$2 billion less than the previous biennium by eliminating programs, freezing wages and cutting health care spending.

At our last 29th District Town Meeting in January, we had an engaging discussion about the 'all-cuts' budget and the need to help folks with the recession. Most agreed this was not the time to throw those worst affected by the economic crisis under the bus. This year, legislators decided to raise some new revenue in order to prevent further cuts to critical services. This was not an easy decision. But ultimately, the \$800 million in new revenue will help fund the following programs:

- K-12 and Higher Education – \$333.4 million
- Basic Health - \$260.6 million
- Senior & Disability Programs - \$167.7 million

In addition to raising nearly \$280 million from closing tax loopholes, we raised our revenue from the following sources:

- Cigarettes: \$101 million
- Bottled Water: \$33 million
- Candy: \$32 million
- Business Services: \$242 million
- Beer & Pop: \$92 million
- Lottery Expansion: \$15 million

Except for the taxes on cigarettes and bottled water, these are temporary tax increases, and will sunset in three years. This was the balancing act of the budget; serving the needs of our constituents without undermining our economic recovery. I believe we found that balance.

The Safety Net: Unemployment Insurance

Arguably the most progressive, positive, and biggest win for working families - and families struggling to make ends meet - this biennium was the unemployment insurance benefit increase (HB 1906). Not only were we able to increase the weekly benefit amount given to unemployed workers (\$45 more per week), we also expanded the ability of workers to attend school and keep their



Gov. Gregoire signs my unemployment insurance benefit increase bill.

unemployment benefits. All together, we provided over \$352 million dollars to unemployed workers.

We also expanded our Shared Work program to allow employers to keep their employees working by supplementing their pay with unemployment benefits. Nearly 51,000 employees have been helped by this program, and it has helped 2,700 employers avoid layoffs during this economic crisis.

I was proud to be the prime sponsor of this legislation.

The Safety Net: Basic Health Access

Last year we were forced to cut back on the number of slots for individuals seeking access to Washington's Basic Health plan, as well as nonprofit community health clinics. This made little sense to me, as unemployed workers have no health insurance. The new revenue we raise, combined with the federal Health Care Reform, will help ensure funding for these clinics and Basic Health program.

We also protected health coverage for all children through the Apple Health program. Our state has almost reached its goal of ensuring every child has health coverage.

Protecting K-12 & Higher Education

I believe the best path to economic recovery is our investment in K-12 and higher education. Unfortunately, last year we were forced to cut 5.3% from K-12 and 13% from Higher Ed, forcing layoffs of teachers and support staff. In 2010, we were able to limit more cuts with the additional revenue we raise.

Education Reform - Last year we approved a major overhaul of our state's K-12 funding system and we began implementing it this year with HB 2775. The bill establishes a new simplified school-funding model, requires a phase-in of smaller classes in Kindergarten through 3rd grade, improves state funding for maintenance, and implements a new transportation funding method. These changes will benefit the school districts in Tacoma, Franklin Pierce, and Lakewood.

Race to the Top - We also approved SB 6696, legislation to make Washington more competitive and generate additional federal help for our schools. This bill includes numerous reform provisions to help low-performing schools.

Protecting Business & Workforce Training

As the recession deepened and people couldn't find jobs, many turned to our community and technical colleges for more training. Unfortunately, given the cuts to the budget last year, there were fewer classes available to them.

Our revenue package this year funds almost 4,000 additional slots for workforce training and restores more funding for our community and technical colleges. This is a crucial investment in our citizens that will help bring more businesses to our state.

We continue to focus on green-job initiatives, i.e., partnering with the federal government in home weatherization, Puget Sound cleanup, and Hanford cleanup. We also passed tax incentives to encourage the building of high-tech data centers, spurring economic development and construction jobs in rural areas of our state. And, as Chair of the House Commerce & Labor Committee, I sponsored legislation to help our auto dealers cope with the General Motors bankruptcy, as well as legislation to assist and protect our realtors and accountants.

Staying Focused on Jobs

Throughout this economic downturn, we have continued to take steps to improve our business climate, incentivize industries, and make smart investments that will lead to jobs now and down the road.

In fact, our first vote this year was on our top priority: Jobs. House Democrats created **The Jobs Act of 2010**, a measure designed to create 38,000 construction jobs all over the state, while repairing public schools and universities and making them more energy-efficient. Not only do we create jobs and opportunities for businesses, but we also save taxpayers \$190 million a year in energy costs and give the state's children safer, healthier schools. This measure will be on your ballot this November, for you to vote on.

We are also making a major investment to ensure that moderate-income people who make up our workforce can live nearer where they work. The Washington Works Housing Act will invest up to a billion dollars to build community capacity in workforce housing. It will also create 8,000 jobs.

In addition, our 2009-2010 Capital Budget will fund Phase 3 Construction at the University of Washington Tacoma, as well as the Tacoma Community College Health Careers Center, the Technology Center at Bates Technical College, and the first phase of the Bethel Skill Center. We also received nearly \$1.5 million to continue our work on the South Tacoma Community Center, a partnership between the Boys & Girls Club and the Park Board. Our capital budget will help generate over 13,700 jobs.

Transportation in Pierce County

When it comes to meeting our transportation needs, this has been a very good biennium for Pierce County. Last year, most of the legislators representing Pierce County banded together to ensure our region's needs were addressed, and I'm happy

to say that our cooperative effort paid off. In total, we secured \$421 million dollars this biennium for projects in the Pierce County area. And over six years, we're looking at almost \$1.2 billion dollars out of a statewide \$4 billion budget.

This means the I-5 HOV construction project from the King County border to the Tacoma Mall will be completed two years sooner in 2013, as well as funding to complete the Nalley Valley interchange expansion and construction of a new Puyallup River bridge on I-5 at the Port of Tacoma.

It also translates into putting people to work quickly on projects that we'll all benefit from in the long run. The boost to our local economy will create 43,000 construction jobs across Washington almost immediately and last throughout the duration of those projects.

Standing with our law enforcement officers

The 2010 Legislative Session opened on a somber note this year, mourning the loss of the law enforcement officers lost in the line of duty this past year. As the families and colleagues of the slain officers watched on, we passed new measures in order to protect those in uniform, as well as increase public safety. It became dreadfully apparent that a single despicable person could exploit loopholes in our judicial system and wreck the lives of many throughout our community in the process.

But we said not anymore. We put in place new laws that will keep those arrested for heinous crimes behind bars longer, and we toughened laws against those who would help criminals. We also provide help for family members and children of officers lost in the line of duty.



I joined the Governor, legislators, and families of our Lakewood police officers at the signing of the bill providing greater benefits to the spouses and children of our officers lost in the line of duty.

HJM 4220 will now allow judges to consider withholding bail on anyone charged with a crime punishable by the possibility of life in prison, thereby restricting release on the toughest, most dangerous criminals.

HB 2625 requires a judge's approval of bail for the release of a person arrested and detained for a felony offense.

HB 2519 increases benefits for families of public safety employees lost in the line of duty.

SB 6548 suspends parole or probation for repeat offenders.

SJM 8026 strengthens the rules allowing offenders into Washington State.

SB 6293 makes it a Class B felony for anyone who assists criminals.

Helping our Veterans

Washington is the fifth largest state for military voters; approximately 67,500 are registered as military or overseas voters. We are proud of our state's long military tradition and Washington's contribution to our nation's safety. Truly honoring the members of our military and National Guard takes more than words; it takes action. House Democrats have a package of legislation in order to make their lives a little easier during their Tour of Duty, and well after it ends.

- Enhancing the Ability to Vote for Soldiers Serving Overseas (HB 2483)
- Improving the Quality of Life for our Disabled and Senior Veterans (SB 6342)
- Extending Military Leave of Absence to our National Guard (HB 2403)
- Encouraging state contracts with veteran-owned businesses (SB 5041)